

Function and Development of the Marvellous in Literature

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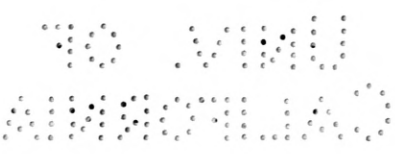
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FUNCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAR- VELLOUS IN LITERATURE.

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While most of the principles and elements of literary art enumerated by Aristotle in his Poetics have received a systematic and comparative illustration from the hands of such modern critics as Brunetière, Texte, Beljame, Paris, and Gautier, there is one important literary ingredient, mentioned repeatedly in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of the Poetics, which has as yet met with no exploitation in the fields of modern literary criticism of the scientific sort. This element, the marvellous (*τὸ θαυμαστόν*), is admitted by Aristotle into tragedy, but is held to have wider scope in the epic; and his further discussion of this now neglected subject precipitated the famous passage on poetic truth. From that time to this almost nothing of comprehensive scope or critical research has been done upon the wonderful by any literary student. Opinions of the moment, to be sure, mere asides from other investigations, have often been thrown out, from Plato or Horace down; and the ancients occasionally made collections of wonder-stories, such as the famous pseudo-Aristotelian ΠΕΡΙ ΘΑΥΜΑΣΙΩΝ ΑΚΟΤΣΜΑΤΩΝ. Photius (Vol. 3, Col. 413) quaintly notices one of these collections as consisting of four books, one each on the following subjects: of in-

credible fiction, of incredible stories about demons, of incredible tales of souls appearing after death, of incredible things of nature. But these patch-quilts of wonder had no more purpose of literary criticism than did the moralistic and philosophic objections of the Greek philosophers who descended upon Homer for employing incredible and impious tales about the gods. The self-conscious epic art of the Italian Renaissance, of Ariosto and Tasso, drew in its wake an acrimonious and voluminous disputation upon the place of the prodigious in epic composition; but the criticism was always dogmatic, *a priori* and partisan—never comparative and inductive. Now and then, in modern times, there have appeared short essays upon the habits of particular writers or periods in dealing with the wonderful, such as Hazlitt's essay upon witchcraft in Shakespeare, or Bodmer's antiquated monograph upon the angels in Paradise Lost (*Kritische Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie*. Zürich, 1740). Fielding, in one of his asides in Tom Jones, discoursed wittily upon the proper use of wonder. In 1880, Yardley put forward a sketchy essay upon The Supernatural in Romantic Fiction, and in the sixth volume of the *Studien zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* there is a collection of medieval wonders. A classification of the wonders in French literature of the age of Louis XIV has been made by Delaporte;¹ and, in 1906, R. Reitzenstein published his *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, which involves a short discussion of some aspects of the Hellenistic wonder-literature. None of these, however, has made a serious attempt to follow up the subject with a definite and exhaustive method.

But in one direction the marvellous has been treated with surprising fullness. The students of ethnology and folk-lore have, with purposes other than those of literary criticism, brought together and partially classified a vast

¹ P. V. Delaporte; *Du Merveilleux dans la Littérature Française sous le Règne de Louis XIV*. Paris, 1891.

number of marvels drawn from primitive and popular religious belief, custom, and superstition. It is unnecessary to cite here the long roster of those who in all parts of the learned world have followed in the steps of Spencer, Lord Avebury, Tylor, and Frazer. By the systematic and devoted efforts of this great band of modern humanists there has been brought together a mass of observations upon, and explanations of, the marvellous element in belief and story, which, though quite independent of any literary interpretation, nevertheless is by all odds the most considerable achievement in the study of the wonderful, not only since the time of Aristotle, but in all time. Such works, to mention only English examples, as the *Principles of Sociology*, *The Origins of Civilization*, *Primitive Culture*, *The Golden Bough*, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, or *The Legend of Perseus*, are as monumental of the success attending the application of the methods of scientific research to spiritual matters as they are unique in the history of humanism.

Dr. Tylor, speaking in the light of his long investigations, has said in the first volume of his *Primitive Culture* that "little by little, in what seemed the most spontaneous fiction, a more comprehensive study of the sources of poetry and romance begins to disclose a cause for each fancy, an education that has led up to each train of thought, a store of inherited materials from out of which each province of the poet's land has been shaped and built over and peopled." Than this statement, based upon the scientific accumulations of Tylor and his fellow-students, there could be nothing more encouraging to the literary student who might wish to take up Aristotle's observations and expand them into a coherent presentation of the function and development of the marvellous in literature. Here, ready to his hand, is a body of data and principles, which needs only an application of the literary point of view and the addition of further data strictly literary that did not enter into the view of the ethnologists, to be reduced to a history and

theory of the appearance, function, and development of the literary use of the wonderful. Upon these data as foundation may be built such criticism of the marvellous as will show the relations between the various cases or details of wonder before they were incorporated into literary beginnings, during the processes of that incorporation, and through the subsequent stages of literary development. By following successively the constantly changing relations of the wonder element to other elements in literature, and to the general principles of literary art and evolution: by observing its concomitant and comparative positions in the various literary types at the different periods of their development; by determining the evolution of particular marvels as they are influenced or determined by parallel changes in the technique and consciousness of the literary artist: by explicating the sometimes obvious, the sometimes subtle, influence of a contemporary philosophical or scientific criticism of the marvellous upon the vitality and popularity of wonder in purely literary usage; by generalizations based upon the inspiration offered by wonder to the individual artist at various stages of his own or of the race's development.—by such employments as these that peculiarly basic element in literary interest, which, as Aristotle racyly observed, persuades good story-tellers, consciously or unconsciously, to add something wonderful to their recitals, would receive the consistent treatment and illustration obviously demanded by its prime, but slightly recognized importance.

In the elaboration of such an essay, however, one of the first desiderations would fall within the field of descriptive psychology, rather than within that of ethnology. It would be necessary to come to some understanding, more exact than the popular view, of what constitutes wonder or marvel. Unfortunately, the psychologists have treated this subject as unsatisfactorily as the literary critics have treated it on their respective side. It becomes necessary, therefore, for the methodical literary student to invade the field of

another specialist, and endeavor as best he may some account of the states and processes of wonder. At this moment only the barest suggestions of such a technical study can be indicated in a non-technical fashion.

In the first place, wonder is of course a complex state and requires an analysis which, among other component parts, will put forward in their proper synthetic relations the states (it is dangerous to call them elements) of surprise, astonishment, curiosity, belief, imagination, fear, and pleasure-pain. But, short of describing the mutual proportions in which these possible ingredients unite to produce states of wonder, it may be suggested that there are four characteristics of stimulus which in their variations account for four corresponding variations in the wonder-state and its allied states.

(1) If the stimulus has merely a sudden character (such as the slamming of a door while one is reading) the response is almost purely that of motor surprise, which passes off in a series of diminishing motor vibrations. But if the surprise is complicated by a considerable degree of fear it may pass into that temporary motor paralysis which often goes by the name of astonishment—struck dumb with astonishment, as the phrase has it. In neither case, however, can wonder succeed unless the suddenness of the stimulus comes under mental interrogation as to its cause. If curiosity finds itself baffled for an hypothesis, then wonder as to the possible or probable cause may supervene.

(2) If the stimulus has an unusual character (such as the appearance of a herd of buffalo in the main street of a quiet New England town; or, to adapt the former illustration to this case, the slamming of a door in an empty house when there is no wind and all the doors are known to be shut) the very conceptual nature of such a character presupposes a response definitely mental, whether attended or unattended with motor disturbances. The disadaptation of usual mental states and habits by the intrusion of the

unusual may at first result in a mental surprise, which, in turn, passing to the stage of interrogative assimilation of the new factor into accustomed ways of thinking, eventuates in a state of curiosity. If curiosity is baffled through a failure in assimilation, wonder results. Should, however, the unusual stimulus provoke fear, the wonder state, up to a certain degree of fear-intensity, will be heightened. Beyond that degree, fear usurps the entire attention and wonder finds no place for its activity.

(3) If the unusual character of the stimulus extends so far as to present to the perceiving mind in no uncertain degree the conception of improbability (such as a story of a trip to the moon and back; or the story of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) the very improbability will tend to abbreviate or even, in some cases, entirely abrogate a state of curiosity in favor of one of wonder, providing always that the improbability is not so great as to instantly destroy all possibility of belief. The improbable is sometimes ridiculous; sometimes it is wonderful. Within the bounds of belief the very sense of the improbability clouds the effort of curiosity to find a sufficient explanation, and gives in advance a sense of the abortiveness in which the effort must end. Such a state is distinctively favorable to wonder. Most important, however, is this fact: that where the stimulus is the improbable, it is found, by the very nature of the case, and at least nine times out of ten, in the form of a story—not in the form of an immediate first-hand experience. In this fact alone lies a justification of the critical study of wonder in literature.

(4) Finally, if the unusual character of the stimulus is of such a degree as to carry the mind directly from the rule of experience into realms ordinarily designated as the impossible, there is *per se* to the skeptical mind no pondering of hypotheses, and the stimulus (such as the story of Polyphemus) awakens ridicule rather than wonder. But if, instead of a thoroughgoing skepticism, there is present a

superstitious inclination and a belief in superhuman powers to whom the impossible is possible, then witches, ghosts and hobgoblins, land of faery, Joshua's ruling of the sun, Circe's magical pranks, and the descent of Orpheus into Hades, arouse wonder. Within the realm of a belief which is wavering this way and that in uncertain fascination with these marvels, wonder is supreme. This is its own chief realm—the realm of *scop* and *troubadour*. Its outposts are the improbable, but its citadel, to express the matter in a further figure, is the impossible. From one to the other wonder rises by leaps and bounds until, in its full regnancy, we behold the dead risen to life, time turned backward, and every corner of the world filled with magicians and their familiars. Furthermore, by this very rise out of reality into the impossible, imagination comes necessarily to the front in the wonder-complex as well as in the wonder-tale. Upon these two, stimulus and reaction, it exerts a circular-like influence, so that the stimulus heightens the reaction, and the reaction heightens the stimulus, only to be itself increased again in turn,—and so on. In a word, wonder grows with the tale and the tale grows with the wonder.—Again, it is through imagination that we still wonder at stories of the impossible even after we have learned the unreality of their pretensions. We give an imaginative consent: and putting aside prosaic reality we lose ourselves in the mazes of poetic adventure.—Lastly, it is obvious enough, and a fact that cannot be insisted upon too strongly, that the very passing out of fact, the very escape from experiential hypothesis, is what throws the marvellous into the arms of literature. The primitive and the troubadour cannot corporeally present their impossibilities: they can only sing of them. Only in literature, again, that home of poetic unrealities, can the sophisticated reader, escaping fact, preserve his ideal standard of possibility. Thus both the two, superstition and sophistication, find their marvels in a *telling*, in literature. This consanguinity of wonder

and literature is in itself a sufficient philosophical reason for undertaking an inquiry into their mutual relations during their respective courses of development.

These four variations in stimulus reveal an ascending order—from the sudden to the unusual, thence to the improbably unusual, and, lastly, to the impossibly unusual. In the rising plane of wonder-states so established it would be very convenient if we could draw a dividing line through the middle and call all states and stimuli belonging to the lower, the sudden and unusual classes, wonderful; and all states and stimuli belonging to the higher, the improbable and impossible, marvellous. For such a technical limitation there is some warrant in popular usage. We pretty commonly feel that the Latin and more learned word, here, as in other cases, possesses a superior dignity and impressiveness. The marvellous is felt, in general usage, to be a bit more wonderful than the wonderful. The lower stimuli and states, where the wonder is of a minor sort and is concerned only with the suddenness or unusualness of things, and where it is so closely related to the matter of surprise and curiosity, might therefore be well distinguished by the weaker word, wonderful. Thus would be designated all those common wonder-tricks of the story-teller by which he raises the interest and suspense of his audience,—such as the employment of surprise, leading to our wonder at the suddenness or unusualness of its nature; or the exaggeration of situation and character until we wonder at the beauty of the one or the heroism of the other. But where the real *marvels* of the improbable and impossible come in, when Merlin and Excalibur and Morgan Le Fay appear, let us drop the word wonderful and begin to speak of the marvellous.—The complete discussion of the problem of the wonderful in literature must of course take into view both of these categories, and the relation of that wonder which is part of the very warp and woof of the story-teller's art,

to those marvels which at times he adds to his tale, or takes for his subject, must be carefully determined. But the former may be treated separately in actual study because it is so much the art of composition, and, as such, presents that division of our problem which demands a psychological analysis of the reader's attention and interest as stimulated by surprise and wonder, rather than an historical research into the literary use of particular marvels. In the rest of this note, therefore, the historical problems of particular marvels in their relations to literary usage and development will alone be considered.

After a preliminary description of the complex states of wonder, and the consequent definition and technical limitation of terms, the student should secure the orientation of the subject by tracing in detail the history of what literary criticism has had to say on the use of the marvellous. Thus the warrant in previous criticism for the present undertaking may be determined, while at the same time the various moments and characters in the development of the critical attitude, themselves considered as stages in the development of the marvellous in literature, may be revealed. As an example of such a review the results of an inquiry into the rise and evolution of Greek literary criticism upon the subject may be cited.² In the following eight points, under which the results are summarized, it becomes clear that the desired warrant may well be taken to lie in the very rise of literary criticism itself from the presence of the marvellous in literature. The last point distinctly characterizes the moments of development.

(1) Greek criticism of the marvellous is for the most part an undifferentiated element in Greek criticism of the fictitious in the poets. In most of this criticism there seems little or no change of emphasis when the illustrations pass from the minor aspects of fiction to the decidedly marvel-

² The citation is drawn from a more extended essay in course of preparation.

lous. Both are criticized in like fashion in the same breath. In some cases, however, notably in Aristotle and Plutarch, the primary reference seems to be to the distinctly prodigious.

(2) Greek criticism of the fictitious arises through a criticism of Greek mythology. This myth-criticism begins with a moral expostulation with the impieties and improprieties of many of the marvellous details of the god-stories, extends to a moral attack upon the fiction of mythology and of the poets in general, and is given something of an economic aspect by Plato, who is also the chief supporter of its ethical character. This criticism is delivered by the philosophers, historians, logographers, and in less degree by some of the poets themselves.

(3) Various solutions are offered of the difficulties and perplexities raised by the impious and fictitious (marvellous) elements in mythology. Rationalization, allegory, euphemism, are broached; they are all philosophical and do not recognize the problem in any other light than that of philosophy and religion.

(4) Inasmuch as the moral criticism and the philosophical solutions are necessarily based upon Homer and Hesiod, these poets themselves, and, by analogy, all poets, are censured and censored. Thus a criticism of poetry, that is to say, literary criticism itself, begins to develop out of the ethical criticism of marvel and fiction. But so long as the ethical preoccupation continues literary criticism does not realize its own separate ends.

(5) At last, with Aristotle, there develops a real literary criticism which is divorced from moral philosophy. This new criticism, in turn, attacks the problem of fiction, and especially the marvellous in fiction, as a purely literary problem. An aesthetic has succeeded the ethical outlook. Thus is developed the theory of poetic truth, under which the marvel assumes its proper place.

(6) The successors of Aristotle mix the real literary

criticism he established with the older moral expostulation and interpretation. Plutarch is the most important name after Aristotle.

(7) Throughout the entire course of critical commentary run certain minor doctrines, which, by extenuating the marvel for the literary purposes of beauty and force, contribute to the aesthetic liberation of the wonderful.

(8) Finally, it may be remarked that these facts concerning the development of a literary criticism of the marvellous, illustrate at the same time a stage in the history of the marvellous. To summarize that stage would be equivalent to repeating the details of the rise of that new Greek consciousness by which the marvels of a believed religion passed through the transitional epoch of ethical distrust and criticism to the condition of accepted aesthetic illusion. Literature then inherited the marvellous a second time,—not, as at first, from religious faith, but from an aesthetic reconciliation.

It is at once evident from these considerations that the marvellous will have found its place in literature, and have thriven there under the fostering guidance of religious faith and superstition, long before it comes to enter upon its aesthetic development under the tutelage of a properly emancipated literary criticism. The discussion of that earlier stage of implicit belief brings the inquiry to the point where the data of the ethnologist and student of folk-lore become available. The relations between literature, religion, and the marvellous must be contemplated in their simplest possible manifestations, that is to say, in their primitive appearances. One must even go back of literary beginnings and endeavor to determine what of marvel there is in that primitive fund of savage custom and belief out of which the tale and the subsequent forms of the tale develop.

But in turning to the beginnings of the marvel in such primitive culture a subjective difficulty is encountered. There will be no difficulty in collecting cases that to a

modern, sophisticated standard of the usual and possible will seem marvellous: but were these things—the control of sun and wind and rain, the magic pointing-stick, the world of spirits or ghosts—were these things marvellous, or even wonderful, to the early mind? The answer, however, is not as difficult as would at first blush appear. The description of the state of wonder will have put into our hands a very real method of measurement in this subjective puzzle: and we shall be able to scrutinize any case of supposed primitive marvel with such aids for determining its original marvel-value as these: to the mind of the savage does such or such a case involve any unusual power, anything of inexplicable suddenness, mysterious rarity, or impossibility; what amount of belief, fear, credulity, or imagination does it call forth; is it, on the other hand, a usual occurrence, a matter of custom, or a habit belonging to each individual? By such questions as these the mental status of marvels in their primitive beginnings may be established with a fair approximation to exactness. I cannot conceive that this subjective side of the problem can be put forward as a demurrer to its value or practicability by those who have themselves indulged in researches upon the tragic, comic, satiric, beautiful, and the like, in literature; or by those who have studied the origins and development of art and belief.

Now, in view of the principles of wonder already laid down, there are certain remarkably apposite observations to be made upon the character of primitive customs and beliefs. In the first place, there is an entire series of conditions which make directly against the marvellous. Primitive mind has no conception of unexceptional regularity. Perceptions of the unusual it certainly experiences, but that conscious concept of unexceptional regularity which magnifies the unusual into a marvel through a recognition of its improbability or impossibility, it does not possess. Furthermore, all rarities in perceptual experience are immediately attributed to agencies of practically unlimited

power, spirits or magicians, both of which are regarded as indubitable matters of fact. Consequently no impossibility is possible to primitive consciousness. Therefore, no sense of the truly marvellous can be present.—Again, the curiosity of the primitive is not such as to support a faculty of marvelling. Outside of a mere sensitiveness to novel objects as such, which expresses itself in stupid staring and mouthing, or aimless stroking and feeling, the curiosity of the primitive extends but indefinitely. Reflective and discriminating character it possesses almost not at all: for the question of the savage, like that of the child, is satisfied with the first answer that comes to mind, as Dr. Lang is at pains to point out,³ and that answer is the answer of imagination. In the mind of the savage imagination takes the place of reflection to a very great degree. A creative activity of mind, rather than a critical examination, is what constitutes primitive reflection, and makes of primitive science a realm of fairy-stories. But such a simple, idle, unreflective curiosity gives nothing of that baffling of hypothesis which makes for marvelling. Thus, too, the imaginative activity itself eventuates in absolute belief, rather than in wonder. Living in a narrow consciousness, where the functions of association completely dominate the mind, the inner presentations of his imagination are received by the savage with the same feeling of reality with which he greets the objects in his external world. “Beholding the reflection of his own mind like a child looking at itself in the glass, he humbly receives the teaching of his second self.”—Finally, magic, so far from being wonderful, is the primitive’s science, and his implicit belief in it is as destructive to the marvellous in magic as the implicitness of his belief in spirits is incompatible with the marvellous in spiritism or animism.

In the second place, it may be observed that, although the matters so far mentioned are inimical to marvel, there are nevertheless already present, even at this stage, certain

³ A. Lang: *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*: I, 51.

tendencies which eventually must develop into wonder. A necessary prerequisite for the development of the wonderful and the marvellous from these primitive conditions is a certain specialization and uniqueness here and there in the midst of common and universal conditions, a separating and seclusive tendency by which the individuality that belongs to rarity and the unusual, may grow up in the midst of the communal character of primitive life and belief. It is the particular, the glaringly personal, the discrete fruit of exaggerated specialties, that is needed as much for the production of real wonder and marvel as it is for the economic and social advance of horde or clan. Now, such specializing, seclusive tendencies appear in various ways. They appear in the development of separate, overlording deities out of the communal mass of spirits. Great, particular and individual spirits, through their awfulness as well as through their uniqueness, raise the heart in wonder; and the close corporation of priests systematically elevates its unusual sanctity for selfish ends. The same characteristic tendency appears in the development of the magician into a special esoteric office, into which induction is a mysterious and dread affair. The professional magician, for the better support of his rare dignity, gathers his powers about him with ever increasing airs of secrecy; and by his playing upon the superstitious credulity of his audience magic itself tends to become "magical." Taboo is another example of the segregating tendency, and its wide diffusion lends importance to these foundations of the wondering faculty. Finally, the universal inclination to exaggerate in telling a tale must be taken as a perpetually present aspect of the particularizing tendency. Indeed this is the mental factor concerned in the elevation of gods, priests and magicians, and the neuropathic experiences of adepts, to an impressive importance above the ordinary and commonplace. These are all children of exaggeration. Exaggeration has lifted them into notability; exaggeration has

crowned priests and endowed magicians; has magnified the gods, and intensified fits of ecstasy, and elaborated the realm of taboo. It has been the more or less unconscious creator of wonderful beliefs and forms and offices. It does not stop there. It finds further employment in the common, everyday practice of talking and telling and recounting the multitude of passing and past experiences. And into the tale are woven the wonder-stock of custom and belief, of god and priest, of magician and the "magical," of trance and vision: by exaggeration in the tale these all receive a particularity of unusualness that transcends experience beyond the avarice of the magician's wildest pretensions. Exaggeration is the first door opening towards that ideal realm of the marvellous, imaginative literature. It may be said to be the gate-way of wonder into literature. As in the history of criticism the marvellous was seen to be closely inter-twined with the beginnings of that discipline, so here, with the faint beginnings of narrative literature in the primitive tale, wonder and marvel are woven into the fabric of the tale by the very exaggerating force which contributes so largely to their actual genesis.

Thus an examination of the forces in primitive custom and belief would reveal more or less clearly two tendencies—one making against wonder, the other for it—which run through these primitive affairs and mental attitudes. The more primitive the people, the greater the former tendency; the less primitive, the greater the latter. The justness of these observations might well be illustrated by a study of the Central Australian tribes which have been described by Howitt, and by Spencer and Gillen. It would not be difficult to detect among those peoples cases to support our general observation that many a marvel-element, recognized as such to-day, was plain matter-of-fact to the savage. Among them, indeed, there is to be met no conception of an unexceptional regularity; spirits of ancestors are as common as men and women, or dogs and trees; their

curiosity passes into a crude imagination, severely dominated by a narrow field of consciousness and the materials of the past: magic is their "science," practised, to a certain extent, by everyone. In a word, as being among the lowest of races, these Australian tribes represent in their greatest observable force the activity of all those tendencies which make against the marvel in primitive conditions. And yet, nevertheless, the contrary tendencies are also operative. The totemic ancestors, for instance, are unique as compared with the crowd of spirit-individuals they were in the habit of leaving at various places; and though in most cases they are little more than mere names, yet their powers are extraordinary as compared with those of their descendants. Moreover, there are certain special spirits possessing various, particular powers, who go by different names, such as the two Puntidirs, the Iruntarinia, and the father and son who are called respectively Mundadji and Munkaninji. Mungan, Nurrundere, Baiame, and Daramulum, whom Dr. Lang would call All-Fathers, are other specializations which illustrate the tendency that must eventually make for wonder and awe. Again, the magician reigns supreme. His power is carefully segregated from the common magic, and his office mightily hedged with mystery. The article by M. Mauss upon this very subject may be cited as ample authority.⁴ The mummeries and mystifications, all quite obvious and conscious deceptions, with which the magicians heighten their office in the public regard, are further proofs of the strong influence towards the wonderful offered by these characters.

Corresponding to these two tendencies, two sorts of tales may be noticed in the collections made by Spencer and Gillen: first, the majority of the stories are of a strictly aitiological character, mere unelaborated answers to "scientific" questions, where the totemic ancestor is hardly more

⁴ M. Mauss: *L'Origine des Pouvoirs Magiques dans les Sociétés Australiennes*. Paris, 1904.

than a name; second, there are a few stories, such as that of Pittongu, the Flying-fox Man,⁵ where exaggeration has entered into the aitiological tale, magnified the ancestor to somewhat heroic proportions, and carried the aitiological material a step further, out of a purely "scientific," into an imaginative interest. In other words, here, before us, is a living case of the wonder-making tendencies converging into a tale which has heroic, imaginative, or better, exaggerative, interest, and finding there a natural home. Indeed this Pittongu tale combines in a most interesting fashion the short aitiological information-tale and the heroic legend. The second half is mostly the former, and quite simply so: the first half is quite as entirely the latter, and quite richly so. The contrast between the two speaks for itself. In the first half the suspense of *dénouement* gained by meticulous detail, the suggestion of character and the thrilling climax—or, in a word, the sense for story—immediately lift us into the realm of narrative interest. Here is no mere answering of questions. Here is an adventure, well told, appealing to human instincts and resting its power on its appeal to human emotions. Here is that exaggeration of the hero's cunning, of his patience, of his power, that characterizes the emotional art of the storyteller. Here, to be brief, is the beginning of the tale *par excellence*, the real home of wonder, that distinctive region where thrives most luxuriantly the wonder that is born of the teller's desire to thrill and the listener's desire to be thrilled. And so, sure enough, there is also to be found in this same tale an expansion of the explanation-element into something decidedly like the wonderful. The ancestor-hero has an adventure in procuring his wives. He has all the powers of the usual totemic father, and others in addition which can hardly have been added by mere chance. Aitiologically they are unnecessary; they make rather for interest, for story. They are exaggerations that hold the

⁵ Spencer and Gillen: Northern Tribes of Central Australia, p. 427.

wonder, if not the marvel. His power of transforming himself into a dog is a rarity in the collection; it is also a rarity in the life of the Central Australian to-day. Only the great and wonderful magician can accomplish such feats. Again, Pittongu's power of throwing the two lubras ahead of him is a strictly individual touch, and the very iteration of the feat, and the dwelling upon it, seem to be motivated by a vivid sense of its present-day impossibility. Then, too, the mighty extension of the hero's fall, the almost Miltonic-like picture of his giant limbs resting upon the country, is a further note of strong exaggeration.

Upon these observations, then, the finger of emphasis must be placed with determination; for here we have an elaboration beyond aitiological "science" into a sort of primitive wonder (which bids fair to develop into what may strictly be termed marvellous), coexisting with the uplifting of the emotion and imagination of the aitiological answer into a story-interest. These two together make a faint beginning of the marvellous of literature proper, the first stage of the story-marvel. Which is cause, which effect, or whether they may both be effects of common social and psychological forces, are subjects for speculation and further inquiry. Through what further stages they may develop on the road out from a religious belief to an ethical skepticism, and on to a final aesthetic reconciliation, and what may be the characteristic changes in the marvels themselves during that evolution, and in the literary technique of their presentation,—these are the questions that naturally follow. As the hero-stories develop into cycles, and the hero-cycles pass from a mere jumble into artistic form and adornment, as they are reformed in a self-conscious epic and achieve a national meaning,—what becomes of this early partnership of tale and marvel? When narrative ceases to be a re-telling of older stories and becomes the province of individual, artistic creation, where the expression of the author's personality gives the distinctive value to the literary product,—what then are the changes

which the partnership endures? What others, with the expression of mood in the lyric and of character in the drama? What new marvels will be added to the old literary-stock through later, individual exaggeration of thought and experience; and how will these new marvels be representative of another economic stage of society? What are the relations of history and marvel? And what is the history of that obverse of the marvellous, the satirical marvel-story, such as Lucian's True History, or Baron Munchausen? What a field is opened out in the European Middle Ages! What a contrast in the recurring successions of creative and critical periods! Nor would the least fascinating aspect of the subject lie in an exploration of Oriental marvel literature and its comparison with that of the Occident.

Even in this mere note upon a big task, some of the more important results to be gained by supplementing Aristotle's old criticism of the prodigious by a modern, systematic research and literary criticism are evident. Particularly is one impressed with the peculiar affinity between the marvellous and literature which at every point has made its appearance. Briefly, in a word, it may be said that both are all compacted of imagination, and that the latter, imaginative literature, offers the most natural play-ground to the other. It would be easy here to wax philosophical and attempt to raise a theory upon the inter-relations of religion, literature and marvel.—a theory that would have as much bearing upon later and even present-day cycles of thought and expression as upon the epoch of beginnings. I believe that in such a system the marvellous would furnish the connecting link or mutual element, and that the better understanding of its glamor would act as much to emancipate the faith of religion as to inspire a new, more spiritual, and more racial romanticism. The romantic return would then no longer be to a past poorly understood, but to *the* past under the light of a consecutive revelation of the development of human aspirations as witnessed in the history of the marvellous.



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